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AN APPLICATION OF THE GROUP PROCESS
PLAN TO A CHAPEL AND GARRISON
CHAPLAIN SITUATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Career Course Curriculum of the US Army Chaplain Center and School (USACHCS) is organized in groups of approximately twelve students. The learning objectives of this Career Course are the result of data gathered and analyzed from what the Chaplain actually does in the field. The small group plan focuses primarily on "soft skills" - those learning objectives which are subjective and conceptual in nature which strengthen interpersonal relationships and are used to solve problems for which there are no absolute answers.¹

"The choice of a learning environment is at least as important as the content to be learned."² The procedure selected is used because it has a message of its own- a message in harmony with the content. It is for this reason that USACHCS uses the Group Process Plan (GPP).

The basic tenet of the Group Process Plan is that the Group teaches itself. The student is responsible for his own learning and it is the responsibility of the Group to insure that learning occurs. The four step learning process of discussing,

¹"The Group Process Plan". (US Army Chaplain Center and School). Fort Wadsworth, New York 10305.

²Ibid.

evaluating the content and method of procedure, assures that the responsibility for learning and recording its own group behaviour provides the framework within which the Group operates.

Growing out of this framework, however, is a corollary and equally important dynamic of group interaction itself:

In the process of reaching group consensus and achieving the objective in a group setting, the group members are forced to interact with each other. It is at this point that human personalities and traits sometimes get in the way and must be dealt with. The individual group members are required to deal with these problems and resolve interpersonal tensions or be frustrated in their efforts to achieve their objective. Thus, the process forces the individual students to become members of a team and to develop an environment¹ in which cooperation takes precedence over competition.

It is the writer's assumption that this group process is a valid teaching/learning experience that merits further consideration and application. The soft skills of problem solving and team building may also be used in a Chapel Congregation or Religious Education setting. Beyond this, there may be occasions when a Garrison Chaplain Staff may use this process for training sessions, brain storming for solutions, and individual Chaplain development in terms of interpersonal relationships and team building.

It is the thesis of this paper that the Group Process Plan lends itself to these tasks, and in specific ways is directly transferable to Chapel organizations and Garrison Chaplain Staffs.

¹Ibid. "The Group Process Plan."

CHAPTER II

THE GROUP PROCESS PLAN

In order that we may review group procedure, let us consider what is meant by group process, how it is developed, its prerequisites and variations providing models for its application.

A handbook prepared by Paul Bergevin and John McKinley entitled Participation Training for Adult Education is one guide for formulating the Group Process Plan.

In developing a participation-training program, participants serve in one or more of six roles: (1) discussion leader (and coleader), (2) observer, (3) recorder, (4) group participant, (5) resource person, or (6) trainer. In smaller groups the roles of coleader, recorder, and discussion leader are combined, and all the functions are handled by the discussion leader, but in large discussion groups a person is usually needed for each of the three roles.¹

In addition to this structure, "responsibility for success of an enterprise is shared by all participants. Each person knows his role and the contribution he must make if it is to result in a fruitful learning experience."²

Groups functioning in most Chapel organizations and Garrison Staffs may be served by a leadership team composed of discussion leader, recorder and observer.

¹Paul Bergevin and John McKinley, Participation Training for Adult Education, (The Bethany Press, St. Louis, 1973), p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 25.

Bergevin and McKinley originally set forth this philosophy of group process in an earlier Design for Adult Education in the Church, known as the Indiana Plan. In this outline, the role of the leader also means a guide. "In this learning, where we are to some degree struggling against ourselves, we are well occupied. We should not have to struggle against a domineering leader, too."¹

The implication here is that the leader facilitates growth and maturity in himself as well as others, by using methods which promote self-awareness and cooperation. "He coordinates and facilitates, he is not a teacher or boss."²

The coleader/recorder in a service role helps the leader coordinate discussion. Through selective recording, significant ideas or points contributed in the discussion are preserved by the recorder. The resource person may be one with technical or professional skills of a given subject or topic. However, even using a person so designated does not preclude group planning. "A careful planning puts the focus on planned discussion, not the resource person's information."³

Frequently for some periods of discussion it may also be helpful to have an observer designated.

The observer for a particular session volunteers to watch how the group functions as a discussion team. He may jot down observations to report when called upon...He should report what he saw happening, not what he thinks should have happened.⁴

¹Paul Bergevin and John McKinley, Design for Adult Education, (The Seabury Press, New York, 1958), p. 6.

²Bergevin and McKinley, Participation Training, p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 32

⁴Ibid., pp. 31,32.

The above delineation of roles and tasks within a group presupposes that the group participants come to share a large part of the responsibility similar to that of the discussion leader. The participant is sensitive to the topic and takes an active part in formulating goals and facilitating the process in order that the group may arrive at consensus. The consensus reached is then an agreement, not a vote. In the process both majority and minority views are evaluated and taken into consideration as they modify and shape discussion. Consensus may also be a tentative working agreement.¹

Having seen a brief structure of an effective group, let us examine some prerequisites and conditions that evolve in the interaction of participants.

1. Shared Planning: Participants share in the development of tasks and goals. Decision on these goals are made by consensus.

2. Shared Appraisal: Participants share in developing each discussion openly, identifying obstacles to effective discussion and growth of individual understanding with plans made to overcome these obstacles.

3. Free Voluntary Expression: An atmosphere is developed in which participants can learn together without embarrassment. They are not pressured to talk or to volunteer as discussion leader or observer. Active verbal participation directed toward the achieving of mutual goals is encouraged.

4. Communication: Emphasis is placed on understanding

¹Ibid., p. 101.

each other's viewpoint rather than proving each other right or wrong.¹

In a successful group, no member withholds relevant information because he is frightened, anxious, disgusted or curious to see what will happen when he finally drops his bomb or quietly provides crucial information after rest of the group has gone down some divergent path.²

5. Mutual Acceptance as Persons: Participants come to recognize that each is a unique individual due respect, support and encouragement, but one with whom he may not necessarily agree. Respect for one's feelings is maintained. Development of free expression depends upon acceptance of each other by participants.³ Membership in the group is clearcut and heterogeneous. Diverse skills, interests and experiences which encourage role differentiation help maintain flexible composition of a group's structure.⁴

When these conditions are present and operable in a group, it has an opportunity to grow from the interaction occurring. One important result of this give and take is a cooperative interdependence. Participants feel free to say what they mean. No longer do they attack one another or try to change one another. They may disagree, but they see each other as persons with

¹Bergevin and McKinley, Participation Training, p. 34ff.

²Glovie R. Shepherd, Small Groups- Some Sociological Perspectives, (Chandler Publishing Company, Scranton), p. 124.

³Bergevin and McKinley, Participation Training, p. 35.

⁴Shepherd, Small Groups, p. 123.

feelings and ideas, instead of opponents against whom they must defend themselves. They are interested in why each believes as he does. They may try to understand each other so they can each struggle with a particular learning problem. There emerges a shared learning, even though learning itself is an individual matter.¹

¹Bergevin and McKinley, Design for Adult Education, p. 71.

CHAPTER III

APPLICATION OF THE GROUP PROCESS PLAN

Having described the philosophy and development of the group process, it is feasible that this process can be applied to situations in the field that effect Chaplains. It is the writer's belief that this Group Process Plan is translateable with equal effectiveness to a chapel organization for religious education and various tasks within the life of a congregation. In a modified way it may also be translated and applied for use by a Garrison Chaplain Staff.

A. The Chapel Center or Autonomous Congregation

1. The GPP could be utilized by the religious education division of a chapel center by a gradual implementation of the procedure outlined above into teacher training and various aspects of congregational life. Workshops, retreats, weekend institutes with assistance of trainers invited to facilitate the process would be typical utilizations of the plan.

2. Within an adult congregation, one can foresee an invaluable contribution that this process can have in terms of a chapel council or steering committee. If the council or steering committee rotates on an annual basis the result would be a new group learning skills that eventually form a core of attitudes

where team building and group participation will grow in effectiveness within the life of a congregation. The ultimate goal of this participation in GPP within a Christian congregation is an understanding of self, love of God, and sensitivity of human need.

B. The Garrison Chapel Staff

The application of the Group Process Plan to a Garrison Chaplain Staff occurs in a modified way because of the variety of skills, experience, and roles of those present.

When the Post Chaplain convenes a staff meeting there may be present a colonel, a Deputy and his Assistant Chaplains ranging in grade structure from lieutenant colonel to captain. Also present would be Directors of Religious Education and a senior noncommissioned officer with a range of experience in the Army from five months to twenty-five years.

Can this mixed bag find harmony in problem solving and brain storming ideas seeking consensus? It is the writer's belief that here too, the GPP lends itself in a unique and compelling way to meet needs of a Chaplain Staff working together.

To address the question of the different roles working together, Shepherd has this positive insight:

Role differentiation refers to the clarity of the roles played by and expected of the members of the group, including whatever leadership roles exist. A successful group is one in which each member's role is clear and known to himself and others in the group. It is also important that the official and unofficial leaders be

known and that they function in ways to facilitate communication so that no member hesitates to contribute his ideas and feelings, and so that some degree of shared influence is present.

The confusion when roles are unknown or unclear is obvious, but it is less obvious that the successful group is one in which role differences are clear and graded in terms of status and prestige.¹

It would appear from this that the integrity or status of each member of the team is not challenged or questioned, but that in assessing the experience level, skills and interests, the Group Process Plan of proceeding allows specific ways for integration into a well coordinated entity.

The Post Chaplain who also finds himself a "man set under authority"² recognizes the source of this authority and is attuned to its possibilities within the framework of group work. In this way the staff functions as a team that has met the needs of individual chaplains, thus freeing them to form more meaningful helping relationships with others.

¹Shepherd, Small Groups, p. 123.

²Luke 7:8.

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